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SUBJECT: CZECHS TWEAK THEIR MISSILE DEFENSE GAMEPLAN

REF: PRAGUE 16

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons
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11. (C) Summary: There are signs that the Czech approach to missile defense has shifted slightly in recent days, partly as a result of the Jan 17 Security Council meeting, partly in response to changes in Poland. For the most part these are not major shifts but simply adjustments to the Czech timeline (which still focuses on the NATO Summit and fall regional elections). Of potentially more concern is the Czech admission that, for political reasons, they may/may need to match some of Poland's security-related demands. End summary.

No shift in timeline, but perhaps less rush

12. (C) The Jan 17 meeting of the Czech National Security Council (NSC) appears to have resulted in some modification of the Czech approach to missile defense (MD) negotiations. While several Czech officials have told us that the NSC did not alter the government timeline (reftel), we have detected some shifts in recent days indicating that, while they do not intend to slow down the talks, the Czechs are feeling at least a little less pressure to move quickly. Specifically:
-- Czech MFA Political Director Povejsil told us on Jan 21 that the Czech side is "certain" it will not be able to conclude the BMDA negotiations after one more round of talks.
-- In the wake of the Jan 22 Pentagon statement that the BMDA talks could be concluded within weeks, a chorus of Czech officials all issued statements stressing the mantra (first heard after the visit of Polish PM Tusk, reftel) that the quality of the agreements is more important than the speed. The consistency of the message suggests an NSC decision to stress this stance, at least in public comments.
-- The Czechs have completely dropped any talk of using PM Topolanek's Feb 27 visit to the White House to sign or somehow formalize completed agreements.

13. (C) FM Schwarzenberg assured the Ambassador on Jan 23 that, notwithstanding the slight change in rhetoric, the government's intentions remain unchanged: they want to conclude negotiations on both agreements before the early April NATO Summit, and to submit both agreements to Parliament for ratification soon after the Summit. (Veronika Kuchynova-Smigolova, MFA Director of Security Policy, told us Jan 24 that she had been misquoted in the Jan 23 press when she allegedly said that the SOFA would not be concluded until after Bucharest. What she said was that the SOFA talks may take longer to conclude, but the GOCR target remains as outlined above.) Schwarzenberg, and Deputy PM Sasha Vondra

separately on Jan 23, confirmed to Ambassador that the Czech political equation has not changed: they want to see ratification occur in the summer, after Bucharest, but well before focus turns to regional elections due in the fourth quarter of 2008.

14. (C) The primary Czech concern about meeting their timeline remains Poland (reftel). The GOCR is very relieved that recent U.S.-Polish discussions have resulted in a sharp reduction in rhetoric from Warsaw which, in addition to calling into question their timeline, was generating some domestic political difficulties (see below). They are also glad that dates have been set for FM Sikorski and PM Tusk to travel to Washington. Their question remains whether the BMDA negotiations with Poland will resume in February or need to wait until after Tusk visits in March. But the government clearly hopes that the negotiating process with Poland will be sufficiently advanced by the spring to allow them to meet their ratification timeline.

Some shifts in mandate revealed

15. (C) The Czechs have understandably not fully revealed their hand in terms of the new negotiating mandates that the National Security Council gave to the BMDA and SOFA teams. In fact, we have heard no details whatsoever on the SOFA. On the BMDA, MFA officials told us on Jan 21 that the new mandate will allow them to move forward on "some, but not all" open issues. According to Kuchynova-Smigolova, the issue of claims for damages is one area where the BMDA negotiators did not get any new flexibility.

16. (C) The NSC added one new demand for the Czechs in the BMDA. In response to a direct request from the Green Party, the Czech side is requesting explicit mention in the body of the BMDA (not the preamble) about NATO and MD. Deputy PM and Green Party Chairman Martin Bursik also made this request directly to MDA Director Obering during his visit on Jan 16. (Comment: The Greens' request for language demonstrates that they are still involved in the MD debate, which is a very positive sign in terms of ratification.)

Shifting political calculations and the need for
some parity with Poland

17. (C/NF) The very vocal negotiating tactics the Poles were using until last week have created a dilemma for the GOCR. Opposition politicians, but also some coalition deputies, have publicly and privately criticized the Topolanek government for not making similar demands from the U.S. This was apparently discussed during the NSC meeting on Jan 17. From comments on the margins of that meeting to visiting General Obering, and this week from senior MFA figures, it is clear that the government has decided that it may need to, for political reasons, somehow match the rhetoric and demands made by Poland. As MFA Political Director Povejsil told us Jan 21, if Warsaw returns to its previous tactic of publicly demanding security guarantees and concrete military assistance (which the GOCR does not believe likely), the GOCR will need to match some of this rhetoric. Further, if the USG decides to give Poland a substantial package of support as part of an MD-linked security agreement, the Czechs will need to ask for something comparable or risk failure in Parliament (Povejsil added that they do not believe the USG will be meeting any more than a fraction of Polish demands).

18. (C/NF) FM Schwarzenberg told Ambassador on Jan 23 that the GOCR firmly intends to keep the focus of Czech requests on improving R&D and scientific/industrial cooperation, which they believe has greater long-term value to the country than defensive systems. However, he too stated that political realities may compel the GOCR to ask the USG for something more, depending on the size of the eventual Polish "package."

We understand Czech Ambassador Kolar has explained this in a similar fashion in Washington.

Negotiations next week

19. (C) We expect the Czech teams to be fully engaged in the negotiations on both agreements next week. They have already made clear to us that they do not expect either agreement to be finalized next week. Further, we are likely to see them reluctant to move too far on the BMDA talks on Jan 31, since they have already said they want to factor the results of Polish FM Sikorski's Washington meetings the following day into their negotiations, and look forward to the opportunity to continue the BMDA negotiations during U/S Rood's visit on Feb 7. The Czechs appreciate that a DOD labor team will hold expert talks on Jan 28. It is too soon to tell whether the Czechs will push for another round of talks in February, however we expect that at least on the BMDA they will want to wait until after Polish PM Tusk has visited Washington in early March.
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